



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ART. II.—1. *The Ruins of Pæstum ; and other Compositions in Verse.* 8vo. pp. 128. Salem, 1822. Cushing & Appleton.

2. *Athens, and other Poems.* By the Author of the *Ruins of Pæstum.* 8vo. pp. 84. Salem, 1824. Cushing & Appleton.

As the book, which bears the first of these titles, made its appearance two years ago, we are not sure that we do not owe our readers an apology for not having noticed it earlier. We should ill fulfil the task we have undertaken, were we to neglect the principal works of this kind, which are published in our own country. We might also obtain credit for sterner natures than we really possess, were we not occasionally won upon to pause amidst our severer labors, and notice those early blossoms, which the spring time of our literature is throwing out along our path. It is, certainly, no uninteresting or unphilosophical speculation to watch the progress of our poetry, and see it gradually assuming a character of its own.

We have read this volume with pleasure and interest. In addition to that strong sense of natural beauty, without which no man can be a poet, there is shown throughout a vein of true pathos, without which the most splendid poetry soon grows tiresome. The sentiments are often fine and striking ; always just, noble, and generous. With these qualities is associated a deep, natural, and unaffected admiration of whatever great and excellent the genius of man has produced in the fine arts. The remains of antiquity ; the wonders of architecture and sculpture, which are left as the vestiges of a mighty race, that has long passed away ; the works of modern masters, and the productions of contemporary talent, are alike the objects of this warm and liberal enthusiasm. Where so many of the elements of poetry are present, we cannot but regret that any cause should mar, in the slightest degree, that perfection and harmony into which they should mingle. We are at the same time glad to see, that if any such cause exists, it is one which the author may easily remove. A little of the *limæ labor*, a stricter attention to the niceties of poetical diction, and a more painful revision of weak passages, would do much towards freeing the poetry of our author

from the imperfections to which we allude. All readers of poetry know how much of its excellence lies in the language; how much of the strength and distinctness of the impression depends upon the way in which it is communicated. There are expressions, which act like a spell upon the imagination and the passions, when the same general idea, conveyed in other combinations of words, shall leave the imagination ungratified and the heart unaffected.

The defect of which we now speak is most perceptible in the author's narrative poems. He seems, if we may judge from the style of these pieces, to have read one of the most delightful and fascinating of the English poets, the author of the *Seasons*, with all that attention which his beautiful pictures of nature, and fine touches of sentiment, justly deserve; but, at the same time, he has contracted something of his diffuse, inverted diction, and foreign idiom. Of all styles in the world this is least adapted to narration. There is, perhaps, as much truth in the following maxim of Boileau, as in any general rule of criticism ever laid down.

Soyez vif et pressé dans vos narrations.

The general effect of any narrative is made up of a multitude of particular impressions on the mind, resulting from the particular incidents related. It is the business of the author to see that these impressions succeed each other in such a manner, that the new one shall be made before the last is effaced, and that each shall contribute to heighten and help forward those that follow. Whatever tends to weaken these impressions, whatever withdraws the attention from the particular incidents, diminishes the main interest of the narrative. An inverted style, by occupying the reader with the search of a meaning, and a diffuse style, by wasting his attention on epithets and expletives, which add nothing to the progress of the story, tend of course to distract the attention and impair the general effect. An elaborate magnificence of diction, overlaying the merely narrative parts of a poem, is like a load of costly drapery about the limbs of a competitor in the foot race.

The author, in one of the notes to his work, ingenuously acknowledges, that the greatest part of the volume was hastily composed. We could find it in our hearts to blame him

for this haste, were it not that the amiable and frank spirit, which pervades the work, makes us reluctant to blame him for anything. He will, at least, pardon us for expressing our opinion, that all authors of what are called works of taste, should set out with a resolution never to come hastily before the public. There is a respect due to the literary world, which should restrain an author from publishing his work, before he has made it as perfect as he is able; in like manner as the decorums of civilized society restrain us from ushering ourselves into a polite assembly with a long beard, an unbrushed coat, and dirty boots. Besides, the advantages of a careful revision are so many and so important, as to render it matter of surprise that any class of authors, particularly the poets, should ever neglect them. It is true, that if the high state of mental excitement, requisite for the writing of poetry, could be kept up from the beginning to the end of a production of any tolerable length; if all the parts could be written with the same glow of inspiration, it might be better for the work that, the author should not tamper too freely with what had been so felicitously and forcibly struck out. But all poems will have their languid passages, the moment of exhaustion always arrives too soon, and often a stubborn idea refuses to be happily expressed. For these evils there is no remedy but revision; the weak passages may be strengthened; the original excitement may be recalled; a lucky moment may supply what was wanting to the first search; or at least what cannot be entirely dispensed with may be rendered more tolerable by being abridged.

From this charge of haste, however, the *Ruins of Pæstum*, the first and largest poem in the collection, and in our opinion the best, must, in justice to the author, be exempted. It is full of beautiful images and fine thoughts. It is a series of reflections suggesting themselves to a beholder of those wonderful and venerable ruins, the remains of fabrics whose founders are unknown, but which still offer models of architecture to the world. The following brief outline, with the extracts we shall give, will enable our readers to judge both of the plan and the execution.

The poem opens with a reflection upon the oblivion into which, to the confusion of human pride, the builders of those mighty edifices have fallen, the works of whose hands have

for so many ages survived even the memory of their names. The history of Pæstum is then briefly traced, from the Phœnician Colony by whom it was founded, through its various fortunes and changes of inhabitants, till

‘ the Roman Eagle seized
The double prey, and proudly perched on high !
And here a thousand years he plumed his wings ;
Till from his lofty eyry, tempest tost,
And impotent through age, headlong he plunged,
While nations shuddered as they saw him fall.’ p. 8.

The decay and desertion of Pæstum followed in the night of barbarism, that succeeded the northern invasion, and the particulars of its decline are involved in the darkness of that period.

The author then passes to the consideration of the individual fortunes of those by whom these solitudes were once peopled. The joys and sorrows of the children of that ancient race were like those of the men of our own time. Crimes were perpetrated, and great and good actions performed from age to age on this spot, which is now so desolate, and both alike are now forgotten. The attachments of domestic life were with them, as with us, the causes of happiness ;

‘ And, ah ! how oft has sorrow pierced the hearts
Of mothers wailing o’er their offspring dead,
Whose graves the blossoms of the infant year
Adorned ! and how have tears, at each return
Of eve or morn, constant bedewed the turf
Where mouldering the endeared mothers lay !
And by the twinkling light of star, or moon’s
Pale beam—that moon whose mellow light now wraps
This shadowy scene subduing all to peace—
What thousand amorous vows in secret here
Were pledged—reciprocated vows—ofttimes
Conferring bliss, yet oft dissolved in air.’ p. 13.

Yet this race, with all their enjoyments and their sufferings, their virtues and their vices, are passed away ; they lie under the fertile spot they once possessed, and these old and mighty ruins are their monument. These ruins too shall perish ;

‘ Yet Nature here
In youth’s perpetual bloom shall still survive ;
The hills still echo to the shepherd’s song ;

The groves, the green retreats of happier times,
 Shall lift their sacred tops amid the heavens ;
 And still these streams shall flow, though not as once,
 Symphonious to the sound of Doric reed.
 Here, too, amid the waste, with blush of morn,
 Breathing Sabean sweets, still lonely blooms,
 And shall forever bloom, thy lonely rose,
 Oh, Pæstum !' p. 18.

The author closes his poem with an apostrophe to his country, of which we give the following lines.

‘ When shall that day come ?
 When shall thy homesick mariner from far
 Descry upon thy promontories bold,
 And seaboard coasts, the colonnade sublime
 Glittering like Pharos in the moon’s bright beams ?
 When shall thy isles their temples boast, and when
 Thy groves majestic, to the favored few
 Reveal the sculptured glories they o’ershade ?
 When ’mid thy Parian quarries shall be seen
 The marble wonder starting into life ?
 When, too, to honor thy illustrious sons,
 Shall Genius bid the glowing canvass breathe ?
 And when, oh when, shall bards like those of old,
 To distant times their deathless names convey ?
 Yet come it will ! the day already dawns !
 I see its bright precursors—rosy clouds,
 And beams effulgent from th’ horizon wide,
 Quite to the zenith shot. And look ! e’en now
 It trembles on the sea’s broad verge—now mounts—
 Oh, glorious view ! the conscious ocean smiles ;
 Wave their high tops the pines ; the vales rejoice ;
 And grateful nations hail the eternal day !’ p. 20.

‘Enda Mohatink,’ and ‘the Deserted Wreck,’ the two poems which follow, cannot, for reasons already given, be considered as very perfect specimens of narrative poetry. Yet they are written with so much feeling, and so true a sympathy, that in reading them, we must regret that any fault of manner should lessen the interest they might otherwise excite. A variety of miscellaneous poems follow, of different degrees of merit, among which that entitled, ‘I thought it slept,’ seems to us particularly beautiful.

There is also a collection of Sonnets, from which we extract the following, not only on account of its intrinsic elegance, but because it gives us the opportunity of transferring to our pages a just compliment to an illustrious and highly gifted citizen of our own country.

‘ Allston ! thy name dear to the enlightened few
Who dare, even here, in this thy native clime,
Where genius pines amid the public view,
Predict the triumph of thy art sublime—

Allston ! even here thy name shall loud resound
In happier times, and not as now, alone
In wondering foreign lands be echoed round.
Ah happier times I would ye were our own !

Still nobly emulous of those sons of art,
Who once the admiring eyes of Greece and Rome
Around them drew, exalting every heart—
Still dare aspire and mount to Fame’s bright home.

Thus the young eagle from some rock’s vast height
Proudly looks down, then soars to endless light.’

The last poem in the collection, entitled Tockwallerdon, reciting an instance of great generosity and heroism in an Indian youth, is the best specimen of narrative poetry in the volume. With the exception of a few passages evidently composed in haste, it is abundantly spirited and impassioned.

We had written thus far, when the volume entitled, *Athens and other Poems, by the Author of the Ruins of Pæstum*, was put into our hands. In addition to the poem, which gives a name to the collection, it contains several miscellaneous compositions in blank verse, all partaking largely of the same interesting qualities, which pervade the volume we have just noticed. We are glad to see in it so many proofs, that the author has employed to good purpose the interval which has elapsed since his first appearance before the public. He shows a greater confidence in his own powers, and more compactness and vigor of thought ; and his numbers flow with a more easy and varied modulation. We find too that he has in some measure anticipated our criticisms on his style, and several of the poems in the present collection show, that he has projected certain important changes in his poetical dialect. There is more force and directness, and less of com-

monplace in his phraseology. There is not such an expression as 'fair science' in the whole book, and few instances of that capricious collocation of words, not called for by any of the exigencies of blank verse, which put the reader in a sort of despair to know the agent from the object. The poem entitled *Athens* describes a view of the ruins of that city from the Museum hill, and sets before us the surrounding country, with its picturesque scenery and glorious recollections. We are, however, less pleased with it than with several of the smaller pieces of a pathetic cast, among which are the *Ocean Travellers*, *Florello*, *Daphne*, and *Alphonso*. We give the following passage from the poem entitled *Daphne*, because we believe our readers will be pleased with its soft and sober beauty, and because it will help them to understand what we mean, when we speak of the improvement in our author's poetical diction.

'Softly I tread the mazy labyrinth, lest
The rustling noise should interrupt the deep
And fearful stillness here. 'Tis thus amid
The forest wilds, when Autumn crowns, as now,
The plenteous year, and the gay antler'd herds
Look sleek, the unwearied hunter threads his way,
And, with a step cautious as Guilt, pursues
The timid chase. But what shall I alarm
In these deserted haunts, where none of choice
Repair, save those whom wretchedness has taught
After long toil to seek for refuge *here*?
The mole has burrowed deep and heeds me not,
The bat has ta'en his headlong flight in search
Of gentler skies, or nestles in some lone
And covered nook, while at my feet sleep those,
Whom not the crash of worlds shall wake again.' p. 53.

There is a brightness and warmth of coloring about the piece entitled *Spring*, which suits well with the bloom, and cheerful hopes of the season it describes.

We take the liberty in this place to hint to the author a trifling fault in the mechanism of his verse. We have noticed several lines ending with an unaccented word or syllable, as in the following instances;

'Immortal streams, on your loved banks reposed,
And still at dewy eve or morn, *shadowy*
Are seen,' &c. pp. 8, 9.

‘Methought I glad alighted on an Isle
Laved by the violet waves, that seemed to *my*
Astonished mind a place of pure delights,’ &c. p. 28.

We take this practice to be hardly allowable, because it breaks down all the distinctions made by the ear between blank verse and prose, and leaves the reader only the barren gratification of beholding the words ranged in lines of apparently similar lengths. While we are upon this subject we would observe, that the license sometimes taken by our author of giving an additional syllable to the end of a line, is liable, from its unexpectedness, to a similar objection. It is indeed used liberally in dramatic poetry; and in a kind of composition so little removed from prose, it has been thought to have a good effect, as giving the versification something of a free and colloquial air. But we are greatly mistaken if it does not strike the ear with a disagreeable harshness, when met with in other kinds of poetry, and accordingly most writers have strictly avoided it.

We dismiss these volumes with feelings of gratitude to the author for the pleasure the perusal of them has afforded us. In the mean time, should he continue to pursue the unprofitable vocation of poetry, we would exhort him never to be seduced by any feeling of lassitude to refuse its labors. Let him apply his talents to the severe tasks it imposes, and he will be sure of obtaining its rewards. No species of composition requires a more perfect abstraction of mind than the writing of poetry, nor tasks the faculties to a more intense and vigorous exertion. When Parnassus is to be scaled, the palm is to him who climbs boldly and directly up its steep; he who would pick out a safe way among the precipices, and sidle slowly and comfortably along in a circuitous path, will never reach the summit. The mighty and enduring edifices, whose remains our author has celebrated, were not built without immense toil; and all that is great and lasting in literature has been produced by strength attacking and overcoming difficulty.